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AUTHOR	Lane, David O.
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ABSTRACT

The major purpose of this study was to assist the data collection firm which the American Library Association had hired to do the actual data collecting for its study of decision-making in the selection of science books for academic libraries. Part of the study was devoted to a literature search on the subject of book selection for academic libraries. Two main trends represented in the literature were: (1) It is the duty of the teaching faculty to do the book selection for academic libraries; and (2) Collection development is one of the prime responsibilities of academic librarians. The majority of the librarians and administrators questioned during this study felt that book selection should be a joint responsibility of faculty and librarians. The majority of the faculty felt it should be their own right and responsibility. The large extent to which libraries use "blanket order" (an agreement between a library and an agent or publisher to purchase all of a certain set of publications) and "approval order" (volumes sent a library are "on approval" and any not wanted may be returned) plans was the nearest thing to a fresh insight received from the data. The blanket and approval orders are shown to be important in the acquisitions of even moderate sized academic libraries. Most librarians and faculty are favorably impressed. (NH)

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APPROVAL AND BLANKET ORDER ACQUISITIONS PLAN

by

David O. Lane
Chief Librarian, Hunter College
City University of New York

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APPROVAL AND BLANKET ORDER ACQUISITIONS PLAN

Several years ago, the American Library Association Office for Research and Development, on a grant from the National Science Foundation, conducted a study of decision-making in the selection of science books for academic libraries. I was privileged to participate as Director of the study, and one of my tasks as Director was to do a literature search on the subject of book selection for academic libraries. The major purpose of this particular study was to assist the data collection firm which had been hired by ALA to do the actual data collecting for the study. A slightly modified version of the study was later published in College and Research Libraries.

It became obvious to me, after devoting several days to the literature of book selection, that two main trends were represented in our professional writing. Boldly stated, these could be simplified into the following:

1. It is the duty of the teaching faculty to do the book selection for academic libraries. The professor selects for his needs and the library orders and processes.
2. Collection development is one of the prime responsibilities of academic librarians. The library should heed the requests of the faculty for specific titles (when reasonable), but the overall task of collection development must reside with the librarians.

It seemed to me that I could see the latter viewpoint coming more and more to the fore as one looked at our professional writings in chronological sequence. I ended the literature search paper with what I thought to be one of the more eloquent statements of the librarian-oriented position on collection development:

"It is the writer's conviction that the librarian ought to assume responsibility for the development of a library collection. If a librarian fails to act the part of a librarian, what is he? He is a custodian of books, a glorified research assistant, a business manager at the most.... Librarians ought to consult with the faculty, librarians ought to take advantage of the special advice that is available to them, but librarians ought not to depend on the faculty to do three jobs - teach, do research, and develop library collections. It is unfair to the faculty and it is unfair to the library."[1.]

As one might expect, these two points of view were represented in the methods utilized in the schools studied, for the National Science Foundation selection inquiry. (I might add that I hope ALA will publish the final report of this study sometime this fall.)

The study turned up no new or radically different methods of book selection. As an aside, one interesting question asked of twenty head librarians, forty-five library staff members, 178 faculty, and 17 college administrators was, who, in their opinion, should be responsible for selecting science library books. The majority of the librarians and administrators felt that it should be a joint responsibility of faculty and librarians. The majority of the faculty felt it should be their own right and responsibility.

In any case, during the course of the investigation, the nearest thing to a fresh insight I received from the data was the rather large extent to which libraries were beginning to utilize blanket order and approval order plans. At this point,

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1. Bach "Acquisition Policy in the American Academic Library" College and Research Libraries XVIII (November, 1957), 446-47.

perhaps we should stop and define these terms. By "blanket order", I am referring to an agreement between a library and an agent or publisher to purchase all of a certain set of publications. It is, in effect, a broad based standing order. It can be an agreement to purchase all the volumes published by a given publisher, or a group of publishers, everything issued in a given country or a given subject, or more broadly, everything of "scholarly interest" published in a nation. Examples of blanket orders would be agreements to purchase everything published by the Oxford University Press, by McGraw Hill, by all of a selected list of University Presses, all new fiction published in Great Britain, or all original books of scholarly content published in Finland. It is, I think, rather obvious that some of the above examples are blanket orders that would best be placed with a specific publisher or publishers, while others would need to be placed through a dealer or jobber. Some libraries utilize blanket orders to obtain the new scholarly publications of all or most all of the University Presses. Others, such as the UCLA Research Library, utilize a large series of rather small blanket orders placed with dependable dealers to obtain the scholarly output of many specific countries (Norway, Finland, Hungary, Syria, et cetera). Other libraries, such as UCSD, utilize a blanket order to obtain, in specified fields, all new publications in a larger nation, such as France. Some dealers handling rather broad based blanket orders for a library will check a copy of the weekly or monthly national bibliography for their country showing what they are sending a specific library. This gives the library's selector a chance to review the choices in the context of that time period's total production and further, provides an opportunity to order additional titles that may be desired. One important characteristic of a blanket order that must be kept in mind is that, in most cases,

the library must pay for and keep whatever is sent it on a blanket order. That is, there are no return privileges.

The approval plan, on the other hand, is just that. Volumes sent a library are "on approval" and any not wanted may be returned. Approval plans usually are worked through library book jobbers and are usually rather wide based (for example, all books on more than text book level pertaining to the social sciences and published in English, excluding reprints, American editions of books first published in Great Britain, and books on comparative religion; or all English language books in the fields of medicine, biology, and clinical psychology, excluding reprints, basic introductory text books, et cetera).

Quite often, with an approval plan, the jobber will complete for each title selected, a multiple copy order form of the individual library's own specification and include it with the book in question.

So, though similiar, it seems apparent that blanket orders and approval plans are rather different in purpose. A blanket order will save the library the cost of individually ordering a certain set or class of books that it knows, sooner or later, it will want. To repeat the example used before, everything scholarly published by a certain press or group of presses, or all new English fiction, et cetera. Blanket orders are based on experience - a library's experience with the product of a given press or with their faculty's interest in new British fiction, et cetera. Additionally, a blanket order may be the only practical way to obtain the output of scholarly publications of a given nation. Again, for example, all the scholarly books published in Finland, or all French titles of literary criticism, History, et cetera. In some cases, a blanket order with a reputable dealer may be the only

way of obtaining all, or the majority, of the important publications of a given country. I might add that libraries that have had the experience of dealing with publishers and book dealers in the Latin American countries know how important it is that the dealer be a "reliable dealer".

On the other hand, the approval plan is an attempt to speed up and make more efficient the acquisition of new publications, usually on a rather broad scale. In a typical example, a jobber may say he can supply a library with all publications in English from North America, Great Britain, Europe, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. Within this large class, a client library may make exclusions, i.e., no bibles, no religious books, no British fiction, no reprints, et cetera, or, by subject, no law, no medicine, no beginning biology, no advanced economics. Within the framework of this unique set of do's and don'ts, the jobber then agrees to supply the library with books for the library's consideration. This is perhaps the major difference between most blanket order and approval plans; with an approval plan, the books are returnable to the jobber. It is obvious that it is advantageous to both jobber and library that returns be kept to a minimum, say five or ten percent. It is often possible, by watching the volumes returned by a library, to further modify the library selection profile and thereby reduce the number of returns.

It has been said that in adopting blanket order and approval plans, libraries abdicate one of their primary duties - book selection. I disagree with this viewpoint completely. In the case of blanket orders, the order of selection is simply changed; rather than knowing that part, most, or all of a given book is important to the library, we know that most, or all of the publications of a given

press, or the scholarly works in a given field of a given country, are important to the library. It is still selection, but on a different level. With respect to approval plans, the change is of a somewhat different nature. In this case, we say we may or should be interested in books of certain classes; therefore, these are sent to the library, as published, on approval. The selection is then done in house, working from the books themselves, rather than exclusively from secondary sources such as reviews. It seems to me that this is no abdication of the selection prerogative, in fact, it is a big step forward in selection routines.

Another argument sometimes used is that once a jobber sends a book to the library, even if on approval, it is easier to keep it than to send it back and, thus, many unnecessary and inappropriate books are added to scholarly collections. Nonsense! To begin with, I firmly believe that the major jobbers in the field of academic library approval plans sincerely try to provide the right books to the right library. It is not in their long term interest to "take" their clients. But more important, I believe it is a slur on librarians to say that they would not return unwanted volumes. Certainly, in my experience with approval plans (and the experience of those of my associates with whom I have discussed the matter), librarians do send back a goodly number of approval books for a good many reasons. To turn the problem around, any librarian who would not return unwanted or inappropriate approval books just because it was too much trouble, should not be working in acquisitions, certainly could not be trusted to select the right books from reviews, and probably should not even be employed as a librarian.

Next, perhaps, we should discuss the question of positive benefits of both blanket order and approval plans. Speed is certainly one positive factor. Though

it is possible that some titles might be received more quickly in the library by ordering directly from the publisher, I think it would be safe to say that, in general, both blanket and approval plans get new publications to the library rapidly. One side advantage in all this can be the goodwill of the teaching faculty. It can be very impressive to a professor if, time after time, the new books in his field are already in the library (and hopefully cataloged and on the shelf, but that's a different matter) by the time he is first aware of them. And with properly functioning blanket and approval plans, it can happen this way.

The larger research libraries need rather inclusive collections in their areas of particular strength. This should include the pertinent new publications from smaller lands, such as, Finland, Norway, Portugal, et cetera; areas that are difficult to cover under traditional selection policies. However, the relevant output of the presses of these lands can be handled quite well by a properly established blanket order. It may require a trip to the nation in question by a member of the library staff to establish such a plan, but it can be, and has been, done. Given the proper instructions - fields of interest, billing procedures, et cetera, to the proper dealer, a blanket order can be a good way and, perhaps, the only way to cover the output of a smaller nation's presses.

One of the more important advantages to the standard sort of approval plan, and to a lesser extent, blanket order plans, is the amount of clerical labor saved a library in not having to specifically order the books received. Additionally, most approval plans are set up in such a way that the library's multiple order form is completed by the jobber for each title supplied. This can represent a considerable saving in clerical time. It also seems probable that these plans do

economize on selection time for the librarians and faculty involved in such duties.

I thought it might be rather interesting to see just how widespread the use of blanket order and approval plans is in our academic libraries today, and more important, what the reaction to them is. Therefore, a brief questionnaire was drawn up and sent out to sixty-six academic libraries across the United States. I might add that these sixty-six were not a random sample. They represent a selection of the medium sized and, therefore, usually public supported academic libraries in the United States. Those contacted were additionally selected in an attempt to give a geographical distribution across the land. So, this is not a scientific sampling. I do feel, however, that the results are interesting. The replies of the forty-six respondents are summarized below.

1. A. Does your library utilize any form of approval plan?

Yes - 31
No - 15

Wide Ranging Approval Plan	15
Narrow or subject based	11
English language publications only	16

B. Does your library utilize any of the following types of blanket order plans?

Yes - 38
No - 8

Various Types of Blanket Order Plans

	Number responding yes
Publisher's Blanket Order	31
English Publications (Great Britain)	10

French	6
German	12
Italian	4
Latin American	11
Spanish	6
Russian	6

Others:

Art Catalogs	1
Australian	2
Chinese	2
German Music	1
Indian	1
Japanese	2
Low Countries	2
Maps	1
Music	2
Pakistani	1
Polish	1
Portugese	1
Yugoslavian	1

2. Are you satisfied with your approval plans ?

Yes - 25
No - 3
Undecided - 2

3. Are you satisfied with your blanket order plans ?

Yes - 24
No - 5
Undecided - 4

4. If "no" to either of the above, please explain.

(Typical complaints)	
Serials present problems	2
Duplicates are received	3

Too much junk received	1
Too limited	1
Takes too much time	2
Pertinent books are not received	1
Late receipt	1
Guidelines not followed	1
Billing and invoicing problems	1

5. How often do you review and/or revise the guides governing the scope and inclusiveness of your blanket order and/or approval plans?

   As needed - 7; Often - 7; Weekly - 1; Six-monthly - 4;
   Yearly - 18; Never - 2.

6. Is this periodical review a satisfactory method of matching the intake of these plans to the needs of your library and its users?

   Yes - 29
   No - 3
   Mixed response - 3

7. What (approximate) percentage of the books received on your approval plans are returned?

   0% - 2; Very few percent - 1; .1% - 2; 1% - 3; 2% - 2; 3% - 4;
   4% - 1; 5% - 11; 7% - 2; 10% - 2; 16% - 2; 20% - 1; 40% - 1.
   (Median - 5%)

8. What (approximate) percentage of your current imprints, by your definition, are added by the operation of the approval/blanket order plans?

   Very small percentage - 1; 7% - 1; 10% - 7; 13% - 1; 15% - 1;
   20% - 4; 25% - 2; 28% - 2; 30% - 2; 35% - 1; 40% - 3; 45% - 1;
   50% - 1; 60% - 2; 65% - 1; 75% - 2; 80% - 3; 90% - 1; 95% - 1;
   99% - 1.
   (Median - 28%)

9. Are the concerned faculty on your campus aware of the operation and existence of your blanket order and approval plans?

   Yes - 40
   No - 2

10. Are the concerned faculty satisfied with the operation and results of the blanket order and approval plans utilized by your library?

Yes - 28
Mostly - 5
Some or partly - 4
No - 1 (in the sciences)
Indifferent - 1

11. If "no" to either of the above, please explain.

(Typical answers were):
20 to 1 of the faculty are in favor of the approval plan.
Some faculty resent the erosion of their order prerogative.
Most are satisfied.
Our plan is not large enough to be important to the faculty.
Science faculty, especially in mathematics, disapprove.
There is some criticism of the scope of coverage.
Science faculty are not happy with it.
Some faculty feel that marginal books are supplied.

12. Is there any intention on the part of the library to materially change any or all the blanket order/approval plans now utilized by you?

Yes - 22
No - 15

13. If so, how?

Expand approval coverage	14
Expand blanket coverage	13
Initiate approval plan	5
Do away with blanket orders	3
Initiate blanket orders	2
Begin French language blanket order	1
Redefine guidelines	1
Expand approval plan in the foreign language areas	1
Initiate more publisher approval plans	1
Do away with area blanket orders	1
Decide if approval plan is worth establishing	1

Some interesting statistics might be gathered from the above replies, but as this was not a scientifically proper random sample of academic libraries, I

am not sure the answers, reduced to averages, would be valid. Therefore, I merely present them to you as an interesting set of facts and opinions from the forty-six libraries that responded.

Conclusion:

I hope I have shown that blanket and approval orders can be an important factor in the acquisitions of even moderate sized academic libraries. They are today quite widely used. The reaction of almost all librarians who have worked with them is generally favorable. Overall, most faculty and even in sensitive areas such as the sciences, the majority of the faculty are favorably impressed. This is, I believe, because such strategems can save time and money for libraries while, at the same time, improving the selection scope, rapidly obtaining important new publications for the library and, in general, allowing acquisitions to function more efficiently.

I can best end by quoting the fifth of the so called acquisition guides around which the forthcoming Acquisitions Study Report is organized:

"Academic libraries should consider the possibility of using one of the various automatic approval acquisition plans now available. Experience tends to show that such a system is often the most practical way for a library to obtain the majority of its current imprints."